

TRAIN BABY HOW TO SLEEP

Exhausted, cranky and sleep-deprived is no way to go through life... for you or your baby. The link between quality slumber and a happy, healthy lifestyle is well documented and undeniable, but once a newborn arrives your days of sleeping soundly in the comfort of your own bed are probably numbered for a while.

The average new parent loses about 350 hours of sleep over the baby's first year, with 64% getting a good night's sleep only one or two nights a week. This is mainly because while the household's newest member sleeps between 13 and 16 hours a day, he or she does so unpredictably, for only a few hours at a time.

The good news? Within three to five months, most babies will have developed regular sleep habits, which include snoozing through the night. But laying the groundwork for these habits to emerge calls for a little coaching.

A few sleep training tips for creating healthy nighttime patterns right from the start:

1. Send a message. Babies are masters at picking up on non-verbal cues. The sooner you convey the idea that "days are for fun, nights are for sleeping," the sooner your child's circadian rhythms will fall in step.

Keep your baby active during the day and maintain structured naps in between feedings. The success you have during the day will directly impact your nights. In the evening, bring things down with calming routines that prepare your baby's mind for rest - reading or singing softly in a semi-dark room. Avoid stimulating lights and noises or activities like tickling and watching television. Add a favorite blanket or soft toy to the sequence; its appearance will soon serve as a gentle hint that it's time to sleep.

2. Stay cool. Keep the room between 65 to 70 degrees. A good rule of thumb to keep your baby at the right temperature is to dress your baby with one more layer than you are wearing. This will avoid overheating your little one. Room darkening shades and dimmers on the lights will also help set the right mood.

3. Declare independence. Get in the habit of putting him down awake, without holding, patting, or rocking him. This will not only condition him to fall asleep on his own, it will also teach him to get himself back to sleep without your help when he wakes in the middle of the night. Remember to maintain a calm, relaxed approach with your baby. Babies know when we are tense, and they won't be able to self soothe if they sense our agitation.

4. Let sleeping babes lie. Once your pediatrician has given you clearance to let your baby eat as needed throughout the night, then you can go "on demand." "On demand feeding" is allowing your baby to sleep until they awake on their own for a feeding. Except when absolutely necessary, it's never, ever a good idea to wake a sleeping baby during the night. Resist the urge to rouse him to meet unexpected company or have a late-night Skype chat with the grandparents.

5. Be realistic. Ultimately, as with eating, you can't force your baby to sleep. However, you can set up your sleep expectations to teach skills for sleep hygiene. Expect that he (and, of course, you) will sleep randomly and erratically during the early months. Get through those sleep-challenged nights by reminding yourself that things will get better, probably sooner than you think. Before long, the challenge will be coaxing your child out of bed to get to school on time.

Based in the Chicago suburb of Naperville, ABC Moms provides parents with a wide range of family care services, from autism and special needs support to in-home training, educational lectures, workshops, and more.

Dana J. Burke, M.S.Ed., Co-Director

Dana Burke has spent the past 15 years working with children, parents, and educational teams in both the public and therapeutic school sectors, providing support as a speech-therapist assistant, classroom teacher, and behavior analyst. In fulfilling these roles, she created and presented many interactive lectures and workshops to educational professionals and parents with best-practice strategies for working with children. Dana also has extensive experience in working with individuals with autism and training their caregivers. She has a bachelor's degree in Communication Disorders and Sciences from Southern Illinois University and a master's degree from Northern Illinois University in Special Education. Dana has completed her coursework and supervision to receive her Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) Certification.

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